

## IN THIS ISSUE

### In with the New, Out with the Old

- **Championing the Cause of Democratic Renewal**

### Workers Speak Out About Their Concerns

- **Opposition to the Use of Special Legislation to Criminalize Workers' Struggles in Defence of Their Demands**
  - *André Jacob, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Quebec Region*
    - **The State of Our Democracy**
    - *Martin Bélanger, Quebec Construction* -
    - **Our Fight Is for the Health and Safety of All!**
    - *Evans Dupuis, Director, Union of Crane Operators (FTQ-Construction Local 791G)*

### In with the New, Out with the Old

## Championing the Cause of Democratic Renewal



In this election, workers, women and youth in many cities, towns and communities, as well as in colleges and universities, are organizing forums for people to express their own concerns. They are determined to not fall prey to the exclusionary politics of the parties which form a cartel party system.

According to the cartels and coalitions which control the electoral process, the cartel parties and media, the people are to be spectators to their electioneering. The cartels and coalitions decide the "issues," the format of "debates," the questions, the answers, the "news" and who can and cannot participate and how they can participate. The process is tightly controlled and the people have no say. A pretense is given of popular participation by collecting questions or comments from random people and on this basis declaring that the issues raised are reflective of what Canadians are thinking and what they want.

As a practical way to oppose that, the MLPC is encouraging its candidates in this election to participate with others in organizing discussion forums of all kinds where people can inform their peers and be informed about matters which concern them. These forums provide alternatives to the exclusionary forms which are rife in the election. They are empowering because people can together work out how matters pose themselves and stands which favour them. They see that they do not have to fend for themselves to make choices which others impose on them.

*Renewal Update* is another public forum the MLPC makes available to workers, women and youth to speak about their concerns without these being framed by what the cartels and coalitions declare are "the issues." It is the only political platform in Canada provided in both official languages on a regular basis. While it is a bulletin published by the MLPC and is partisan to its platform for democratic renewal, it is not sectarian which is what the word partisan has come to mean. This is because it is linked to the vicious party politics which have no partisanship to uniting the people in action so as to provide society with an aim which is theirs and provides a path to progress.

Let everyone use this election to speak in their own name! Send *Renewal Update* to your co-workers, neighbours and fellow fighters on different fronts. Send *Renewal Update* your reports, photos, questions, answers and comments. Make a financial contribution so we can help the youth keep this work going! Let's make democratic renewal a way of life! *Empower Yourself Now!*

---

### Workers Speak Out About Their Concerns

## Opposition to the Use of Special Legislation to Criminalize Workers' Struggles in Defence of Their Demands

- *André Jacob, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Quebec Region* -

With regard to people working for the government, I'm very concerned about the special laws being adopted. One was passed against us postal workers in 2011, then another in the fall of 2018. Taking into consideration that this has become common practice and that workers' rights are being disregarded when our employer is the government, how are we going to be able to negotiate anything?

Workers are being deprived of their right to negotiate to improve their working conditions, through the imposition of special legislation. The worker's goal in joining a union is to improve his or her working conditions. To be so openly disregarded come negotiation time encourages the idea



that to be unionized makes no difference, that we'll put up with the situation until we've had enough and then change jobs. Yet union jobs are good jobs and we must fight to keep them.

In relation to the society as a whole, special laws serve to denigrate unions. One could say that it's "union bashing," as if unions deserve to be discredited that way. It serves to reduce the rate of unionization, to lower working conditions.

We know that Labour Canada issued several non-compliance notices to Canada Post regarding what the local joint committees (*health and safety committees - RU note*) observed with respect to the condition of the buildings and work methods. Labour Canada realized that these problems remained at the committee stage for months without being resolved.

Through special legislation all health and safety demands are handed to the arbitrator appointed under the special law. This takes the initiative away from the workers. It also demobilizes people who are already largely left on their own in the joint health and safety committees. We have health and safety demands when we want to renew our collective agreements and we have provisions in our collective agreement that deal with health and safety. Through special legislation the rug was pulled from under our feet, so how do we go about getting our demands addressed and met? It's the workers who observed those situations, who worked on the file. Now all this is placed in the hands of a third person who will render a decision on the basis of who is most capable of influencing him, because that's how justice is administered. We have to get the judge to look at it from our angle, our way of thinking, to adopt our evidence rather than someone else's. It's not even an issue of the truth anymore.

During our last negotiations, even though we took the step of asking for conciliation from the start in order to avoid getting ourselves in the same situation, here we are once again.



When I meet people from the Liberal Party of Canada, I ask them why they voted for the special legislation. Some people from the Liberal Party told me that they didn't have all the information, that they did what they could within the time frame they had to look for the information. One member of Parliament told me that he voted in the house with the information he had, which was from the newspapers and the internet. We know that not all journalists are thorough in the work they do on different topics or in researching various subjects. Often, what the employer sends them is simply taken as the truth.

We fight against all this constantly. Sometimes we feel we've made gains, however because of economic, partisan or political reasons, the rights we have by virtue of our bargaining power that comes from being organized in a union, can be violated.

We're going to have to deal with other special legislation in the future, or situations like at ABI, where workers were locked out for 18 months and then simply repudiated by the Quebec government. It was the government that allowed Alcoa not to pay its electricity bill and it's the people who will foot the bill for those hundreds of millions of dollars.

I think that we all have to work together to be able to deal with the situation.



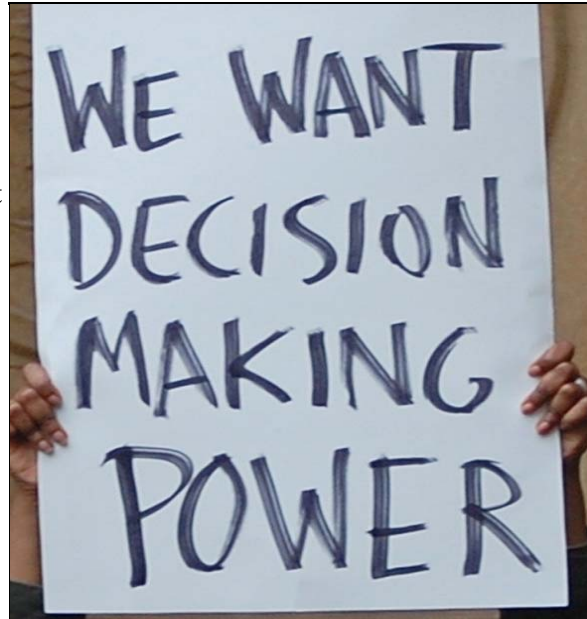
---

# The State of Our Democracy

- *Martin Bélanger, Quebec Construction* -

First and foremost as a citizen, I find that our right to vote is biased. Yes, we go to vote, but what are we voting for? Candidates are imposed on us. We already know that there's a big machine behind them, that the big multinationals are the ones pulling the strings.

When there's talk of a leader's debate we're told that the debate will determine who to vote for. However, that leaders' debate was all worked out months ago; the questions are pre-determined and deal with topics meticulously chosen to make an opponent look bad. Everything is organized so that people there only respond to questions presented within a perspective of getting votes. Where are the questions that people have, such as why election commitments are not respected? Have those concerned, those who are going to vote, really been consulted as to what their preoccupations are, what they want, what their worries or problems are? These are not open, public debates. We're told that the concerns of those who are going to vote are dealt with through opinion polls. Everyone knows that you can bend figures to get them to say whatever you want, to control or filter information.



Yet it's the people who vote. That's democracy as we have it. I think that increasingly, democracy has become an image we are given rather than a real system that enables us to function together.

We have the same problem in the construction industry. We're told that democracy is expressed through a 50 per cent plus one vote. Yet, for the ratification of collective agreements, the Quebec government adopted a law eliminating the established procedure of 50 per cent plus one of votes cast. Now, three out of the five unions involved in the construction industry must also vote in favour of ratifying a collective agreement for it to be adopted.

What's also being limited is the right of union representatives to communicate with workers on construction sites. The representative does not have the right to disturb workers while they're working on site. He doesn't have the right to organize a meeting and once you are two, you're considered a group. If we do meet, we may be subject to prosecution and lose the right to represent workers for five years. The right of workers to speak to their union representatives is being restricted. We're required to speak to each other outside of working hours.

We're seeing a similar problem with health and safety on construction sites. Health and safety are crucial on worksites but because they come at a cost, despite proof that for every dollar invested in health and safety at least \$100 is saved, companies remain reluctant. Increasingly, rather than using the issue of health and safety for prevention, it's used as a means to control the worksite, and to carry out repression against workers. Operating through repression allows for the laying off men and women in the name of health and safety, rather than undertaking the required prevention measures.

Construction workers have fought many battles on the issue. Not only have we fought for reasons related to the well-being of workers, we've also fought for the system to work for us all. Take for example the case of the crane operators where we provided well-founded arguments in support of their security and that of the public at large, against a reduction in crane operator training requirements that creates risks for us all.

---

## Our Fight Is for the Health and Safety of All!

- *Evans Dupuis, Director, Union of Crane Operators*  
(FTQ-Construction Local 791G) -

**Renewal Update:** What are the latest developments in your fight for the safety of workers and the public?

**Evans Dupuis:** We denounced the Minister of Labour's position because he decided to implement the Committee of Independent Experts' recommendations.[1] We declared that its recommendations were unacceptable from a health and safety standpoint. We called on the government to intervene to get the Labour Minister to reconsider his decision, however the government refused to budge. We also called upon the Minister of Education to intervene in the matter. We received no response from him, as all he did was pass the file along to the Labour Minister.

The entire milieu, the crane operators themselves, the FTQ-Construction affiliates, the teachers' union representing those who provide the vocational training to those wanting to become crane operators, the Crane Owners' Association, all of us denounced the Labour Minister's position. As for the Education Minister, we published an excerpt of the comments he made while in the opposition against the reduction in crane operator training by the Liberal Party when it was in power. Now that he's in power with François Legault's Coalition Avenir Québec government, he's playing the same game as the Liberal Party did at that time.



The Labour Minister has endorsed the Committee of Independent Experts' recommendations. The committee recommended an initial three-week training period in an educational institution, it maintained onsite training during the apprenticeship period, while also prescribing refresher training classes during the same period.

What we are saying is that the recommendations do not comply with the committee's analysis. In its analysis, the committee pointed out that the best training for crane operators, one that meets safety standards, is the 870-hour Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP). If you say that the best training is the DEP, you cannot then turn around and recommend three weeks of training. It makes no sense. How do you compare the 870-hour vocational training to an initial vocational training of three weeks? In our opinion, the true initial training is the 870-hour DEP. Furthermore, how does one maintain the training of boom truck operators with only 80 hours of training instead of the DEP?

We demand that the mandatory 870 hours of vocational training be reinstated. In addition, we agree that the past experience and skills of workers from other industries should be taken into consideration, within the framework of the DEP. That means, as has already been provided for by the Ministry of Education, that given their skills and experience, they may not have to complete the entire 870 hour program, as long as this is all done within the compulsory DEP.

The Minister has now given the Quebec Construction Commission (CCQ) the mandate to implement the committee's recommendations, without the issue of health and safety being sorted out in any way, shape or form. The entire crane operator milieu has denounced the changes. The Committee of Independent Experts has even recognized that the sector is opposed to the changes. However, the Minister is not taking the opinions of those directly involved in the sector into consideration. The Minister is listening to the lobbying of the employer and of the CCQ. The Liberals did the same thing. How can you refuse to listen to the majority?

The health and safety of workers and of the public is at the heart of the matter. This has been the case since the beginning. Crane operators need to know that their colleagues have adequate training to do their job.

## **Notes**

1. In April of 2018, the former Quebec Liberal government unilaterally imposed new regulations governing crane operator training in Quebec. That decision overturned the norms and training that had been established for new crane operators to ensure not only their own safety, but also that of other construction workers and the public at large. The new regulations abolished the mandatory character of the 870 hour Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP) training required in a professional institution to become a crane operator. The DEP is now optional. A new 150-hour training provided directly on the worksite and under the responsibility of the employer has been introduced. The government also replaced the vocational diploma with an 80-hour course for the operation of boom trucks with a maximum capacity of 30 tonnes. This type of boom truck is precisely the crane that overturns most frequently and causes the most damage.

The crane operators and their union have firmly fought and are still waging a fierce battle against this attack on the safety of construction workers and the public. It's within this context that the government established the Committee of Independent Experts in September of 2018, with a mandate to assess the security aspect of the new regulations. In its report issued in March of 2019, the committee said that the DEP remains the reference standard for the training of crane operators, however it has accepted that it become optional. As an alternative, it proposed a three-week initial training period and that on site training be maintained.

**Send your articles, photographs, reports, views and comments to  
[editormlpc@cpcml.ca](mailto:editormlpc@cpcml.ca)**

**SUBSCRIBE TO RENEWAL UPDATE**

**E-mail [postmaster@cpcml.ca](mailto:postmaster@cpcml.ca) with "subscribe" in subject line. Please include your name, riding and occupation. See homepage for full subscription form.**